

All Souls'

by Rhea Tregobov

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Reviewed by Sue Sorensen

Several poems in this skilful collection were so good on first reading that I put the book away for a while and later returned to see if the same shivers would occur. They did. Particularly in “Housework,” a poignant poem about her aging Winnipeg parents, and “The New House,” a gift poem for her son, Rhea Tregobov demonstrates her mastery of intimate moments of sadness that contain a strange simultaneous joy. The book’s epigraph from Raymond Carver asks “And did you get what / you wanted from this life, even so?” and the first poem, “D’un certain âge,” signals Tregobov’s current emphasis on the disappointments and surprises of maturation and aging. This focus is personal, but also global; many poems feature her hopeful, angry fears about our beleaguered planet.

Tregobov is an affable poet, lyrical and smart, with occasional bursts of vernacular jokiness that leaven things nicely. More often than not it is a dexterous phrase that will catch one’s attention, rather than a whole poem. The call to write a poem in “D’un certain âge” awakens by “putting its little hands on your face” (13), and in “Le Temps des Cerises” the poet wistfully wants “this curious project to continue” (24) even though this project is the failed human stewardship of Earth. But the entire poem of “Leaving Toronto” is a stunner – the city evoked in terms of malfunction and filth, yet great affection – as is “Party,” a tour de force of shape-changing evocation and writerly ingenuity.

Still, Tregobov’s most potent contribution is perhaps the full and incisive attention she gives to those apparently small, distinct moments when words, suddenly, are vivacious and crucial. The soundscape of “The Gardens of the Antarctic” is alive with crunchy language: *eking, pip, growlers, tating, scabbed*, and (my favourite) *indigenous midges* (2526). Her effects are auditory and intellectual, but then move outward from brain and ear. The reader’s response is bodily and even spiritual. ❧

Sue Sorensen teaches English at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. She is the author of the novel *A Large Harmonium* and most recently was included in the poetry anthology *Desperately Seeking Susans*.

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